News Release RECLAMATION
Managing Water in the West

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Endangered Snail Found in Snake River Below Minidoka Dam Agencies to Continue Collaboration on Dam Operations

A species of mollusk has been confirmed to exist in the upper Snake River below Minidoka Dam, Federal officials announced today.

The Snake River physa, a freshwater snail, was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act on December 12, 1992. It had not been collected since the 1980s and was believed to be extirpated from its Snake River habitat.

Snail samples were collected by the Bureau of Reclamation from 2006-2008 in the 11.5-mile stretch of the Snake River starting at Minidoka Dam and extending downstream. The samples were sent to a mollusk expert at the University of Michigan for taxonomic and genetic analysis.

“Results of independent analysis positively confirm the presence of Snake River physa in the Snake River below Minidoka Dam,” said Jerrold Gregg, Manager of Reclamation’s Snake River Area Office.

In accordance with the ESA, Reclamation consulted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on operations and maintenance at 12 Federal projects in the upper Snake River basin and in 2005 the Service issued a Biological Opinion on this operation. As part of this consultation, Reclamation agreed to conduct a survey to determine whether Snake River physa existed in the action area.

Jeff Foss, Field Supervisor of the Service's Snake River Office, said, "We commend the excellent scientific work Reclamation conducted with the snail survey that resulted in the collection of Snake River physa. This important confirmation will provide a greater understanding of the species and its habitat. We look forward to the final report."

Following the discovery of the snail, discussions started between Reclamation and the Service on how this discovery might affect the 2005 Biological Opinion. Current water operations are consistent with the existing 30-year Opinion, and Reclamation is not proposing any change in its existing operation. The adaptive management approach included in the proposed action will

allow for minor operational modifications to minimize adverse effects to physa. The agencies will continue to evaluate new information and potential impacts to the species.

Montana State University researchers coordinated the study effort and will be compiling and analyzing all three years of the survey data. A final report, to be provided to Reclamation in March 2010, is expected to provide a better understanding of whether and how operations may affect this species.

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